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ABSTRACT

Group vocational counseling has been criticized as being individual counseling in a group setting. All counseling has been criticized when goals are not set in the initial stages of counseling. The present investigation superimposed a group discussion process over a typical vocational counseling process in which the primary focus was on test information and over two atypical vocational counseling processes, one in which occupational information was primary and the other in which test information and occupational information were optional and randomly presented upon a group member's request. All subjects were studied in six single-sex, experimental groups and two control groups. The atypical groups learned significantly more and retained more than did both the typical groups and the control groups. (Author)

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A COMPARISON OF THREE METHODS OF GROUP VOCATIONAL COUNSELING*

Franklin P. Westbrook

Research Report # 9-74

*This study is based on a dissertation by the author under the direction of William L. Elster and submitted to the Department of Counseling and Guidance, Indiana University, in partial fullfillment of a doctoral degree in June, 1971. The author expresses appreciation to Philip L. Lauver and Robert H. Shaffer for their assistance.

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Abstract

Group vocational counseling has been criticized as being individual counseling in a group setting. All counseling has been criticized when goals are not set in the initial stages of counseling. The present investigation superimposed a group discusssion process over a typical vocational counseling process in which the primary focus was on test information and over two atypical vocational counseling processes, one in which occupational information was primary and the other in which test information and occupational information were optional and randomly presented upon a group member's request. All subjects selected goals in the initial stages of counseling. Fifty-seven subjects were studied in six single-sex, experimental groups and two control groups. The atypical groups learned significantly more and retained more than did both the typical groups and the control groups.

A COMPARISON OF THREE METHODS OF GROUP VOCATIONAL COUNSELING

University of Maryland

December 13, 1973

Kagan (1966) and Thoresen (1969) complained of the dearth of research on group vocational counseling. Zimpfer (1968) added that no group counseling method had been reported and that what was being reported was, in fact, individual counseling in a group setting.

Krumboltz (1954) raised the issue of setting specific goals for counseling. He insisted that the goals be ones that the client accepts as his own. Krumboltz and Schroeder (1965), Thoresen and Krumboltz (1967), and Ryan (1968) found that reinforcement of behaviors that were germaine to previously set goals was effective in changing the behaviors.

The objective of this study was to determine which of three group counseling methods was most effective in helping students achieve pre-selected goals in vocational counseling.

Method

Subjects

Fifty-seven first semester college freshmen, 28 males and 29 females, served as Subjects in the study.

Procedure

At their enrollment advisement interview, 2,200 first semester freshmen were administered a Levels of Decision-Making Scale which had six levels. One hundred and sixty-eight students who checked levels four and five were deemed suitable for Subjects in the study, and fifty-seven agreed to participate in the study.

The 168 eligible students were notified by letter that they had been identified as students who might profit from a group counseling program offered by the Counseling Center. Enclosed with the letter was a form on which they were asked to check: I am interested in the counseling program, I am not interested in the counseling program (If you are not interested in the counseling program, check one of the following): a) I prefer individual counseling, b) I am not interested in counseling at this time, c) I am interested in the program but my schedule will not permit me to participate. Enclosed with the letter was a form showing possible times for group sessions and the times and place of group testing sessions. Students were asked to indicate on this form the times they were available for group counseling sessions and the group testing session they expected to attend.

Seventy-three (43%) of the 168 students responded to the letter and 42 of the students attended one of the two group testing sessions. Six of the students upon attending the testing session discovered that they did not want group counseling or that they were not free at the times that groups would meet. They were immediately offered individual counseling and were dropped from the study. Thirty-six students remained as Experimental Subjects.

Of the 73 respondents, 10 indicated they either wanted individual counseling or were not interested in counseling at the time; twenty-one indicated they were interested in the program but their schedules would not permit them to participate. These 21 students became the Control Subjects for the study.

My Goals for Group Counseling was administered at the beginning of the first session at which time the Subjects were required to select the two goals they most wished to accomplish. The Behavior Survey was administered at the end of the fourth session (midterm), at the end of the eighth session (final), and as a follow-up (sixteen weeks after the study began).

All groups were conducted by the same counselor who was an advanced graduate student experienced in both individual and group counseling.

Groups

The treatment subjects (16 males and 20 females) were assigned randomly by sex to three treatment groups and participated in eight weekly sessions of vocational counseling.

Treatments

The treatments in this study were designed to develop a vocational group counseling process that would satisfy Zimpfer's (1968) criticism that vocational group counseling is actually individual vocational counseling in groups. The process involved having the Subjects discuss themselves in relation to the manifest needs found in the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule Manual (1959).

The manifest needs were described as responses to personal interactions and life situations and the group leader attempted to elicit categorical statements from each group member on each manifest need. For example, on the first manifest need under need Achievement, the leader attempted to elicit from each group member either "I do my best" or "I do not do my best." The vocational implications of what the Subjects said about themselves were discussed.

The Test Interpretation-Occupational Information Group treatment consisted of four weeks of working with test information and four weeks of working with occupational information. The group sessions began with the group leader providing a group interpretation of one test each session in the following order: Kuder Preference Record, Form C, Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, Hollander-Parker Grouped Personality Needs, and the Occupational Preference Inventory. The group members were then encouraged to discuss the manifest needs. The Occupational Information-Test Interpretation Group treatment began with occupational information for the first four weeks and ended with test information. The group procedures were the same as those of the former group.

The Case Study Group (Hewer, 1959; Sprague and Strong, 1970) treatment consisted of an opening statement by the group leader listing the instruments that had been administered and made available and a brief statement about the information that could be gained from them. He then chose a group member, one Case each week, who explained his reason for joining the group and provided demographic data on himself. The group leader then charged the remaining group members with the responsibility of helping the Case achieve his stated goal(s) and encouraged them to discuss the manifest needs.

The Control Group treatment consisted of the pre- and post-test instruments which were sent through the Campus Mail at approximately the times they were administered to the Treatment Subjects. No further contacts were made with them.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were a Levels of Decision-Making Scale, My Goals for Group Counseling, a Behavior Survey, the Edwards Personal

Preference Schedule, (1959), and the Kuder Preference Record, Form-CM, (1956); the latter two instruments are standardized tests that are frequently used in research.

The Levels of Decision-Making Scale is an instrument especially designed for this study which contains six levels enunciated in short paragraphs. They begin with the following topic sentences: Level 1. I know exactly what occupational field I want to enter. Level 2. I'm rather certain about the occupational field I want to enter. Level 3. I am really not certain about the occupational field I want to enter. Level 4. I have thought about several occupational fields, but I just don't know which one to enter. Level 5. I have almost no idea what occupational field I want to enter. Level 6. I have made a choice of occupation and would like to stick to it; however, I doubt that I can.

A pilot study of this instrument completed at the University Counseling Center showed that the majority of the respondents who were involved in or applying for educational-vocational counseling checked levels four or five (N=131).

The My Goals for Group Counseling is an instrument especially designed for this study which provides eleven possible goals which follow Krumboltz's suggestion that goals be made explicit. The goals are: To learn about abilities, interests, occupations, personal needs, and how these relate to occupational choice: To learn about graduation requirements and the process of decision-making; To make a tentative or final choice of major or tentative or final choice of occupational goal. The goals are rated on a five-point Likert-type scale with one being "Of No Importance" and five being "Of Extreme Importance."

The Behavior Survey is an instrument especially designed for this study which requires a rating on a four-point scale as to how much was learned on the items listed on the My Goals for Group Counseling instrument. It required the Subjects to indicate sources from which their information came. Choices were: purposefully read material, accidentally found reading material, radio, television or movies, parents, teachers, counselor, friends, roommates, group members, and other.

The Hollander Parker Grouped Personality Needs instrument was developed from the research of Hollander and Parker (1969). They reported finding personal needs from the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule related to Holland's (1963) six occupational types, i.e., Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional.

The Occupational Preference Inventory is a checklist on which the Subject checks "Like", "Dislike", or "Indifferent" for the occupations Holland (1963) indicated to be typical of six occupational environments.

Results and Discussion

During the first four weeks of the study, the Test Interpretation-Occupational Information Group made rapid progress and reported more learning on Chosen Goals than on Goals Not Chosen ($p < .05$). The Case Study and Control Groups reported no significant learning. The Occupational Information-Test Interpretation Group reported more learning than the latter groups but less than the former group, and the difference was not significant.

By the end of the counseling program, the Test Interpretation-Occupational Information and Control Groups reported no significant learning between Chosen Goals and Goals Not Chosen while the Occupational Information-Test Interpretation and Case Study Groups reported significant learning, $p < .05$ and $p < .01$, respectively.

Table . presents the t tests for the Follow-up data. The means of Chosen Goals versus Goals Not Chosen are significantly different, ($p < .05$), for the Occupational Information-Test Interpretation and Case Study Groups.

Enter Table 1 About Here

These differences may be accounted for on the basis of the degrees of independent work motivated by the presentation procedures. The Test Interpretation-Occupational Information Group presentation format probably conditioned the group members to feel that the information they needed for making a vocational decision would come from the leader. They were, therefore, not motivated to focus on the goals they set and to make the kind of explorations outside the group that would lead to greater goal accomplishment. They reported learning relatively evenly across all possible goals. The other Treatment Groups had the same information but the presentation formats encouraged them to look to other sources for information. Consequently they reported learning on Goals Not Chosen that was comparable to that reported by the Test Interpretation-Occupational Information Group while reporting significantly more learning on Chosen Goals.

In spite of Krumboltz's assertion that specific goals should be set in a counseling contract, the findings suggest that the setting of specific goals may not be sufficient to insure a meaningful counseling experience. All of the Subjects in the study began by setting specific goals; yet, the Subjects perceived their gains from the counseling experience to be greater when the discussion process departed from a primary focus on test information.

Table 2 shows the sources from which Subjects reported acquiring significant vocational information. It supports the assumption that the Test

Interpretation-Occupational Information Group's information came, primarily, from the counselor and that the Occupational Information-Test Interpretation Group was motivated to work outside the group setting. The Case Study Group did not identify a major source of information, and what the Control Group reported is not clear.

Enter Table 2 About Here

The results further indicate that (1) a counseling process through which Subjects learn about themselves and the world of work before they receive test information facilitates significant learning, (2) a counseling process through which Subjects learn about themselves but can request and receive test information and information about the world of work as they desire it provides significant learning, and (3) the information gained in the group setting is more lasting when it comes other than from the counselor.

Future research might clarify issues related to the presentation of test information. What causes the different effects when test information is presented at opposite ends of a series of counseling sessions? What causes the same information to be more beneficial to the Subject when he asks for it, regardless of the time, as opposed to giving it to him at pre-selected times? How much and what kinds of structure can produce positive effects in group vocational counseling?

One limitation of this study is found in the fact that the researcher was also the counselor, which raises the possibility of an observer effect (Campbell and Stanley, 1963, and Rosenthal, 1966). While this criticism

appears to be satisfied by the Subjects' perceptions of their learning rather than counselor's judgment producing the data and the difference between perceived learning on Chosen Goals versus learning on Goals Not Chosen constituting the primary analysis, it should be kept in mind when generalizing from these findings.

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Table 1

t Test Analysis Summary Table: Difference between Reported Learning Levels on Chosen Goals versus Goals Not Chosen--Follow Up

	Mean	SD	N	df	t
Test Interpretation-					
Occupational Information					
Chosen Goals Versus	2.286	1.380			
Goals Not Chosen	1.677	.665	7	75	1.098
Occupational Information-					
Test Interpretation					
Chosen Goals versus	2.600	.876			
Goals Not Chosen	1.796	.715	10	108	2.139*
Case Study					
Chosen Goals Versus	2.350	.884			
Goals Not Chosen	1.619	.563	10	108	2.055*
Control					
Chosen Goals Versus	1.385	.845			
Goals Not Chosen	1.825	.859	13	141	1.295

*$p < .05$

Table 2

Chi Square Analysis of the Difference between percentages of Information-Seeking and Acquisition Behaviors that Contributed to Learning on Vocational Goals at Midterm and Final Evaluations

Information-seeking and acquisition behavior	Group	Observer frequency	N	Theoretical frequency	X
Midterm:					
From reading material which you purposefully sought out.	Test Interpretation-Occupational Information	72	14	117.00	17.36
	Occupational Information-Test Interpretation	202	9	117.09	61.58*
	Case Study	114	10	116.85	.07
	Control	80	19	116.97	11.69
Counselor	Test Interpretation-Occupational Information	392	14	257.94	69.67*
	Occupational Information-Test Interpretation	277	9	257.94	1.41
	Case Study	261	10	257.43	.05
	Control	101	19	257.69	95.27*
Final:					
From the television or movies.	Test Interpretation-Occupational Information	31	9	62.01	15.51
	Occupational Information-Test Interpretation	32	8	61.95	14.48
	Case Study	47	9	62.02	3.64
	Control	138	13	62.02	93.10*

df = 30; X, 43.77 p < .05; *p .001